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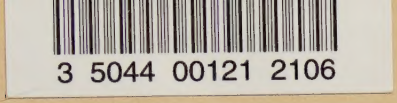
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Chills and Fever

BORZOI POETRY

COME HITHER
Edited by Walter de la Mare

SHIP'S LOG
Grace Hazard Conkling

OUT OF SILENCE
Arthur Davison Ficke

SLEEPING BEAUTY
Edith Sitwell

DING DONG BELL
Walter de la Mare

THE SEA
James Oppenheim

HARMONIUM
Wallace Stevens

ULUG BEG
Autolycus

Chills and Fever

Poems
by
John Crowe Ransom

New York *Alfred · A · Knopf* *Mcmxxiv*

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

These poems I dedicate to

R. R. R.

and the summer of 1921,

when, if ever, came perfect

days.

I wish to make proper acknowledgments to the *Fugitive,* the *Literary Review,* the *Bowling Green* (New York *Evening Post*), the *Chaffing Dish* (Philadelphia *Evening Public Ledger*), the *Sewanee Review,* the *Double Dealer,* and the Poetry Society of South Carolina, for the use of poems previously published under their copyrights; and perhaps especially to the last-mentioned, who published "Armageddon" in separate biblio as the winner of the Southern Prize for 1923.

John Crowe Ransom.

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Agitato ma non troppo

I have a grief
(It was not stolen like a thief)
Albeit I have no bittern by the lake
To cry it up and down the brake.

None there hath been like Dante's fury
When Beatrice was given him to bury;
Except, when the young heart was hit, you know
How Percy Shelley's reed sang tremolo.

"If grief be in his mind,
Where is his fair child moaning in the wind?
Where is the white frost snowing on his head?
When did he stalk and weep and not loll in his bed?"

I will be brief,
Assuredly I have a grief,
And I am shaken; but not as a leaf.

Spectral Lovers

By night they haunted a thicket of April mist,
As out of the rich ground strangely come to birth,
Else two immaculate angels fallen on earth.
Lovers they knew they were, but why unclasped, unkissed?
Why should two lovers go frozen asunder in fear?
And yet they were, they were.

Over the shredding of an April blossom
Her thrilling fingers touched him quick with care;
Of many delicate postures she cast a snare;
But for all the red heart beating in the pale bosom,
Her face as of cunningly tinctured ivory
Was hard with an agony.

Stormed by the little batteries of an April night,
Passionate being the essences of the field,
Should the penetrable walls of the crumbling prison yield
And open her treasure to the first clamorous knight?
"This is the mad moon, and must I surrender all?
If he but ask it, I shall."

And gesturing largely to the very moon of Easter,
Mincing his steps, and swishing the jubilant grass,
And beheading some field-flowers that had come to pass,
He had reduced his tributaries faster,
Had not considerations pinched his heart
Unfitly for his art.

"Am I reeling with the sap of April like a drunkard?
Blessed is he that taketh this richest of cities;

But it is so stainless, the sack were a thousand pities;
This is that marble fortress not to be conquered,
Lest its white peace in the black flame turn to tinder
And an unutterable cinder."

They passed me once in April, in the mist.
No other season is it, when one walks and discovers
Two clad in the shapes of angels, being spectral lovers,
Trailing a glory of moon-gold and amethyst,
Who touch their quick fingers fluttering like a bird
Whose songs shall never be heard.

Bells for John Whitesides' Daughter

There was such speed in her little body,
And such lightness in her footfall,
It is no wonder that her brown study
Astonishes us all.

Her wars were bruited in our high window.
We looked among orchard trees and beyond,
Where she took arms against her shadow,
Or harried unto the pond

The lazy geese, like a snow cloud
Dripping their snow on the green grass,
Tricking and stopping, sleepy and proud,
Who cried in goose, Alas,

For the tireless heart within the little
Lady with rod that made them rise
From their noon apple dreams, and scuttle
Goose-fashion under the skies!

But now go the bells, and we are ready;
In one house we are sternly stopped
To say we are vexed at her brown study,
Lying so primly propped.

Winter Remembered

Two evils, monstrous either one apart,
Possessed me, and were long and loath at going:
A cry of Absence, Absence, in the heart,
And in the wood the furious winter blowing.

Think not, when fire was bright upon my bricks,
And past the tight boards hardly a wind could enter,
I glowed like them, the simple burning sticks,
Far from my cause, my proper heat and centre.

Better to walk forth in the murderous air
And wash my wound in the snows; that would be healing;
Because my heart would throb less painful there,
Being caked with cold, and past the smart of feeling.

And where I went, the hugest winter blast
Would have this body bowed, these eyeballs streaming,
And though I think this heart's blood froze not fast,
It ran too small to spare one drop for dreaming.

Dear love, these fingers that had known your touch,
And tied our separate forces first together,
Were ten poor idiot fingers not worth much,
Ten frozen parsnips hanging in the weather.

Triumph

Athens, a fragile kingdom by the foam,
Assumed the stranger's yoke; but then behold how meek
Those unbred Cæsars grew, who spent their fruits of Rome
For ever after, trying to be Greek.

I too shook out my locks like one born royal;
For she dissolved in tears, and said my barbarous name,
And took my oath, she was so piteous and loyal:
Vote the young Cæsar triumph, spread his fame!

But oh, I find my captive was not caught.
It was her empty house that fell before my legions;
Of where her soul inhabits I have conquered naught;
It is so far from these my Roman regions!

Two Sonnets

I. YEA

It was beside the fire that I had lit,
Out of the rain that drummed upon my roof,
She leant against my bosom, fluttering it,
And stared beyond my world, far, far aloof.

And neither spoke, and thus we might have sat
Till angry Gabriel trumpeted for change,
But she said, "Heart of stone, look not like that!
O unconcessive husband, you are strange."

For joy I could not answer, being taxed
By such a star, so distant in the sky,
With being cold. But think how the poor heart waxed,
The chidden wonder of women, the huge I!

And I played the god; disdaining her no more
I smiled, and drew her closer than before.

With such strong arms I shut my love about,
She rested there, which was to me a token
This was a house she never could walk without,
Securely bricked, and never to be broken.

But no, the tight imprisonment was vain,
Too physical and wide to catch a heart;
When we had come most near, and scarce were twain,
Some soul was still unmet, and much apart.

Therefore I knew the most unperjured lips
That ever sweetly bargained love's exchange
Must lie; love must be blacked with this eclipse,
That she and I could live, and still be strange!

And as for death, whose stroke dissevers men,
What fool would hope for firm possession then?

Spring Posy

Running to meet us came neighbours' daughters nigh,
Fluting like birds, and calicoed bright and clean;
And beautiful else had been their bosoms poutering by!
"But ye are a cloud," I said, "too much between."

I was waylaid in a depth of woody grot:
Was it a fox in his fern, was it a wing's blue sheen?
In her widow's weed the balsam? But how ye prospered not,
When full of her images I saw not your scene!

Up once I rose in a fury of heard-of things
To travel the splendid sphere that twirleth in its fame;
But the wars and ships and towns, and pestilent roaring kings,
These angered me, and why? They fought unknowing her name!

To a Lady Celebrating Her Birthday

Too quick the annual sun returns,
Mounts to the ledge and scans the pillowed face
Whereon four seasons hardly have writ the trace,
Though even he on his timeless circuit mourns
That faintlier his fire burns.

Bring proper gifts to beauty then:
Bring topaz, emeralds, gold, and minerals rare,
Musk that will ever be sweet on mortal air,
Bright stiff brocades outlasting the short ken
Of usual mortal men.

Bring only tokens fixed and sure:
Bring kind affections, merited deep and strong,
And though poor hearts never have lasted long,
Swear splendidly to how they shall perdure
As true as now, as pure.

But bring no gift of trembling flowers:
Dear comrade, never on pain of pain suppose
From the blowing of any little wasted rose,
Up clomb the enemy in the airy towers
To number beauty's hours.

Ah, but I think you clearly know:
Sure eyes, you have observed on what hard terms
Beauty has respite from voracious worms;
Her moment comes; thereafter fast or slow
Her daily funerals go.

Dear love, rise up and proudly sing:
For even foreboding soldiers deep at night
Make up no prayers against to-morrow's fight;
They fling sweet oaths on high, not honouring
The dismal nearing Thing.

Come to the company and play:
For even that sinful Babylon when surprised
Put not her sackcloth on nor sacrificed;
The revel roared, and few stood off to stay
And greet the mournful day;

Unearthèd liquors were poured out,
The burghers dined, in no constricted rage
At sudden death as fearsomer than age,
The harlots danced, the elders at least with shout
Tossed brittle bones about.

Small, small my heart inclines to boast:
What can a virtuous poor pale lover do
Who's prey to dissolution quick as you?
This day smells mortuary more than most
To me upon my post.

Know this, though desperate our cases:
Thus will I hold you out of other harms
Till these be palsied paralytic arms;
Then be we grizzled polls and yellow faces
In these respective places.

Vaunting Oak

He is a tower unleaning. But he may break
If Heaven in a rage try him too windily;
And what uproar tall towers concumbent make!

More than a hundred years, more than a hundred feet
Of timeless trunk that is too vast to shake;
Only the temporal twigs are abashed on their seat,

And the frail leaves of a season, which are susceptive
Of the mad humours of wind, and turn and beat
Ecstatic around the stem on which they are captive.

But he casts the feeble generations of leaf,
And naked to the spleen of the cold skies eruptive
That howl on his defiant head in chief,

Bears out their frenzy to its period,
And hears in the spring, a little more rheumy and deaf,
After the tragedy the lyric palinode. . . .

Now a certain heart, too young, and mortally
Yoked with an unbeliever of bitter blood,
Observed, as an eminent witness of life, the tree.

And she exulted—being given to crying,
"Heart, Heart, love is so firm an entity,
It must not go the way of the hot rose dying"—

For the venerable oak, delivered of his pangs,
Put forth his flames of green with profuse joying
And testified to her with innumerable tongues.

And what but she fetch me up to the steep place
Where the oak vaunted? A meadow of many songs
Had to be traversed; and a quick populace

Of daisies, and yellow kinds; and here she knew,
Who had sorely been instructed of much decease,
Better than brag in this distraught purlieu.

But above the little and their dusty tombs was he
Standing, sheer on his hill, soiled by few
Of the knobs and broken boughs of an old tree,

And she murmured, "He is established, you see, for ever."
But thinking that she had lied too piteously,
I knocked on his house loudly, a sorrowing lover,

And drew forth like a funeral a hollow tone.
"Largely, the old gentleman is," I grieved, "cadaver.
Before our joy shall have lapsed, even, he is gone."

I knocked more sternly, and his dolorous cry
Boomed till its round reverberance had outdone
The singing of bees; or the coward birds that fly

Otherwhere with their songs when summer is sped,
And if they stayed, would perish miserably;
Or the tears of a girl remembering her dread.

In Process of a Noble Alliance

Reduce this lady unto marble quickly,
Ray her beauty on a glassy plate,
Rhyme her youth as fast as the granite,
Take her where she trembles, and do not wait,
For now in funeral white they lead her
And crown her queen of the House of No Love:
A dirge, then, for her beauty, Musicians!
Ye harping the springe that catches the dove.

Parting at Dawn

If there was a broken whispering by night,
It was an image of the coward heart,
But the white dawn assures them how to part—
Stoics are born on the cold glitter of light,
And with the morning star lovers take flight.
Say, then, your partings; and most dry should you drain
Your lips of their wine, your eyes of the frantic rain,
Till these be as the barren Cenobite.

And then? O dear Sir, stumbling down the street,
Continue, till you come to wars and wounds;
Beat the air, Madam, till your house-clock sounds;
And if no Lethe flows beneath your casement,
And when ten years have brought no full effacement,
Philosophy was wrong, and you may meet.

Miriam Tazewell

When Miriam Tazewell heard the tempest bursting,
And his wrathy whips across the sky drawn crackling,
She stuffed her ears for fright like a young thing,
And with heart full of the flowers, went to weeping.

But the earth shook dry his old back in good season,
He had weathered storms that drenched him deep as this one,
And the sun, Miriam, ascended to his dominion,
The storm was withered against his empyrean.

After the storm she went forth with skirts kilted
To see in the strong sun her lawn deflowered,
Her tulip, iris, peony strung and pelted,
Pots of geranium spilled and the stalks naked.

The spring transpired in that year with no flowers,
But the regular stars went busily on their courses,
Suppers and cards were calendared, and some bridals,
And the birds demurely sang in the bitten poplars.

To Miriam Tazewell the whole world was villain,
To prosper when the fragile babes were fallen;
The principle of the beast was low and masculine!
For weeks she went untidy, she went sullen.

Here Lies a Lady

Here lies a lady of beauty and high degree.
Of chills and fever she died, of fever and chills,
The delight of her husband, her aunts, an infant of three,
And of medicos marvelling sweetly on her ills.

For either she burned, and her confident eyes would blaze,
And her fingers fly in a manner to puzzle their heads—
What was she making? Why, nothing; she sat in a maze
Of old scraps of laces, snipped into curious shreds—

Or this would pass, and the light of her fire decline
Till she lay discouraged and cold as a thin stalk white and blown,
And would not open her eyes, to kisses, to wine;
The sixth of these states was her last; the cold settled down.

Sweet ladies, long may ye bloom, and toughly I hope ye may thole,
But was she not lucky? In flowers and lace and mourning,
In love and great honour we bade God rest her soul
After six little spaces of chill, and six of burning.

The Tall Girl

The Queens of Hell had lissome necks to crane
At the tall girl approaching with long tread
And, when she was caught up even with them, nodded:
"If the young miss with gold hair might not disdain,
We would esteem her company over the plain,
To profit us all where the dogs will be out barking;
And we'll walk by the windows where the young men are working
And to-morrow we will all come home again."

But the Queen of Heaven on the other side of the road
In the likeness, I hear, of a fine motherly woman
Made a wry face, despite it was so common
To be worsted by the smooth ladies of hell,
And crisped her sweet tongue: "This never will come to good!
Just an old woman, my pet, that wishes you well."

Fall of Leaf

With a rocking and guffawing,
Winter set his wind to blowing.
Oaken leaves of pale or brown,
Hickory leaves of sere,
Leaves of ash that tumbled down,
Weary, weary were.

Farthest from the living green
The sumac pitched his blood-red scene;
But pale or red the leaves were failing,
His dear hearts and hers;
Dick and Dorothy were quailing,
Summer foresters.

Dick and Dorothy look forth
And every quarter is a north.
Each old comrade is forlornest,
Bush, and trumpet-vine, and tree;
Is it jest? or in good earnest
Goes the sombre colloquy?

"Dorothy, the year's played out,
His green young armies all in rout.
Some are pale and some are bleeding,
Green the summer long,
And the rattle-throats are pleading
With a foe too strong."

"Dick, the play is done for them
And every leaf that grows on stem.

And leaves and lovers have in common
That the leaves are dry and blown,
And the husk of man and woman
Withers on the bone."

"Dorothy, we grow no younger,
Need we play it any longer?
Methinks eastward is a gate
Rusted, and a slim white spire;
Go tell them you come cold and late
To help them tend their fire."

"Dick, those are the Holy Rood
And sweet Saint Margaret's sisterhood.
Fearful are the maids, nor many,
Narrow is their bed;
They must open not to any
Woodwife wrapped in red."

"Dorothy, then westward come
Where the night-bells promise home.
For the arduous dome is black
But the gate is golden;
They will joy to have us back,
Loyal and beholden."

"Dick, they tend Saint Gregory's tomb,
The strictest monks in Christendom.
Tenants of a godly house,
Of cleanly gear and hallowed,
They will think but little use
Of woodman stained and yellowed."

"Dorothy, then will you tell
The way that goes from Lovers' Hell?
All the potent charms are said,
We that clasp are cold and wearied;
Heartless lovers are as dead
That walk the earth unburied."

"Dick, they found the ending good,
The Babes that ventured in the Wood.
So tell the leaves that die and fall,
As we lie a-shiver,
Stop and stitch us one close pall
To hide us deep for ever."

Rapunzel Has Submitted Herself to Fashion

Rapunzel, and Rapunzel,
All this day will I cry upon you,
Accusing, Was it well
How the old witch has enviously undone you?

Undone of your tangled snare
By which the midnight moon was sifted and stranded;
Forlorn of the rippling stair
Whereon the secret lover had ascended.

For when it came to night,
And the breath-shortening of the most shut hour,
Should he have mounted light
And delivered you with a kiss, and possessed the tower.

But the beldame spat between
The crooked blades of shears,
And put her warty hands to the sheen
Of your hair, and hacked it off, and maybe hacked your ears.

Do you sit at the casement still,
Braving the ruins of your smile but wanly?
Prince there shall come not till
He may climb to his kiss on a rippling ladder, only.

The Vagrant

Now what can he want,
The vagrant, the lout,
Who leers in the parson's face,
Lolls with tongue out?

Nothing that you have,
Men with a motor car;
God keep you your high hats
And fine things that are!

With a knot in his bosom
And a bee in his brains,
He goes full of pictures
Around the flat lanes.

His breeches are patchy,
His shirt full of thread,
But the hair's plastered neat
On his great hollow head.

Then think you he means
To harm our precious daughters?
Why, gentlemen, he fishes
In deeper waters.

Lou Margaret, Kittie,
Em with the country curls,
Are sweet bites for red lips,
Very fine girls;

But he visits with others,
With the Queen Guinevere,
Troy's women, Eden's,
Towns not near.

So leave him leering,
Loitering in the lanes;
There's no mischief in him
But a bee in his brains.

Boris of Britain

If ever your sleep goes bad,
Have in the chymist that Boris had.
When Boris' head was blown with trouble,
This man pricked the bubble;
For Boris, loath to take to his bed,
To the cunning chymist took his head;
But Boris' heart knocked louder and louder,
As chymist mixed him the green powder,
And he shook it, and he shook it,
And with misgiving took it.

How did Boris get to court?
By a conveyance of a sort,
Hardly wood, hardly steel,
Beetle's wing, snail's wheel—
Sprawled upon the chymist's bed
Boris lay an hour like dead,
For the chymist went to look
And saw him there at three o'clock,
So he deposeth in a book;
One minute after, in the court,
Was Boris, arguing a tort,
Boris in his periwig,
Looking learned, talking big.
It was the great Boris—none
Could get a sweeter justice done.

What did Boris do there?
Got deliverance of a snare.
Poison brewing at the bone

Exploded against the chymist's one.
Too many prisoners in docks,
Liars in the witness box,
Advocates hired to the devil,
Fed his ingrowing evil.

Accused was in a stinking tale
Conceived in terror of the gaol,
When to the whole court's surprise
Old Boris thunders, Lies! Lies!
And for not telling what he knows,
Old Boris smites him on the nose.
Gentlemen are on their feet,
Boris willing to repeat,
And there's your easy barrister
As mad as the March-most hare.
Up with hate, contempt, grudge,
Which in the white bosom lodge!
Order, order! It was not,
Boris too infernal hot,
Drew his fist and let 'em have it,
Got it back as good as gave it,
Went for eye and went for wig
Of coward, tattler, meddler, prig.

Boris darted in and knocked 'em,
Boris laid about and crocked 'em,
Jurors, gentlemen, and clients,
Neo-British bobby giants:
A man by pea-green powder charmed,
For down he dropped unharmed.

Now the barrister is disbarred.
'Twould have hit the old Boris hard;
This was not he—the wind in the head
Escaped when Boris dropped like lead.

Boris, a single-minded man,
Has turned an honest publican,
With a preference for quiet
But an aptitude for riot;
Serves the trade without deceit
And shows the merry ones the street;
And as for the lass named Nellie—no man
Has a helpfuller woman.

So he put her in his picture
Of a lady he was painting,
Put her lips, which smiled but faintly,
And her eyes, which levelled quaintly,
While her length of limb and noble Roman bust,
These he copied as he must.

And she was a perfect model,
Never restless with her features,
Never agitating greatly,
More than still and less than stately,
Till he knew that he could limn the dream aright
In his honest Northern light.

He had nearly done his portrait,
But there came a day in April;
There was treachery come winging
On the dust of flowers springing;
It was not a day for artist to play host
Lest the man come uppermost.

And he knew that he was changed,
Was changed the wintry lady.
It was but their way of speaking,
It was but their way of looking,
But the cunning all had fled his fingertips;
So he bent and kissed her lips.

Then for all his giddy pulses
He laid grim hands on the picture,

And he trampled it with loathing,
Flung it many miles to nothing,
And it screamed to wake the devils as it fell
Till it thundered into hell.

Then a silence straightway took them
And they paced the woodland homeward.
What a bitter noon in April
(It was April, it was April)
As she touched his fleeting fingers cold as ice
And recited, "It was nice!"

As hath been, lo, these many generations,
The best of the Van Vroomans was the youngest;
And even he, in a chevroned sailor's blouse
And tawny curls far from subdued to the cap,
Had slapped old Katie and betaken himself
From games for children; that was because they told
Him never, never to set a wicked foot
Into Fool's Forest, where the devil dwelt.

"Become Saint Michael's sword!" said Max to the stick,
And to the stone, "Be a brand-new revolver!"
Then Max was glad that he had armed so wisely,
As darker grew the wood, and shrill with silence.
All good fairies were helpless here; at night
Whipped in an inch of their lives; weeping, forbidden
To play with strange scared truant little boys
Who didn't belong there. Snakes were allowed there
And lizards and adders—people of age and evil
That lay on their bellies and whispered—no bird nor rabbit.
There were more rotten trees than there were sound ones;
In that wood, timber was degenerate
And rotted almost faster than it grew;
There were no flowers nor apples; too much age.
The only innocent thing in there was Max,
And even he had cursed his little sisters.

The black tarn rose up almost in his face—
It was as black and sudden as the pit
The Adversary digs in the bowels of earth;

Bubbles were on it, breath of the black beast
(Formed like a spider, white bag for entrails)
Who took that sort of blackness to inhabit
And dangle after bad men in Fool's Forest.
"Must they be bad?" said casuistical Max.
"Mightn't a good boy who stopped saying his prayers
Be allowed to slip into the spider's fingers?"
Max raised his sword—but what can swords do
Against the Prince of the Dark? Max sheathed his point
And crept around the pool.

In the middle of the wood was a Red Witch.
Max half expected her. He never expected
To find a witch's house so dirty and foolish,
A witch with a wide bosom yellow as butter,
Or a witch combing so many obscene things
From her black hair into her scarlet lap;
He never believed there would attempt to sing
The one that taught the rats to squeal and Bashan's
Bull to bellow.

"Littlest and last Van Vrooman, do you come too?"
She knew him, it appeared, would know him better,
The scarlet hulk of hell with a fat bosom,
Pirouetting at the bottom of the forest.
Certainly Max had come, but he was going,
Unequal contests never being commanded
On young knights only armed in innocency.
"When I am a grown man I will come here
And cut your head off!" That was very well;
Not a true heart beating in Christendom
Could have said more, but that for the present would do.

Max went straight home; and nothing chilled him more
Than the company kept him by the witch's laugh
And the witch's song, and the creeping of his flesh.

Max is more firmly domiciliated.
A great house is Van Vrooman, a green slope
South to the sun do the great ones inhabit
And a few children play on the lawn with the nurse.
Max has returned to his play, and you may find him,
His famous curls unsmoothed, if you will call
Where the Van Vroomans live; the tribe Van Vrooman
Live there, at least, when any are at home.

Grandgousier

Dry bones,
Dry brains,
And priest to pray;
Belly that groans
Of its long thirst-pains,
It is all that remains
Of the Grandgousier.

You fitted his muzzle,
Bishop Bamboozle;
Bishop Bamboozle,
You voided his guzzle.
You shall have crowns
And angel gowns.

Your delicate snout
Had nigh snuffed out
When the member observed 'em—
Bitters and stout
And cider at spout,
And the wenches that served 'em—
Each spidery chink
Was a freshet of drinkables,
Clink-clink-clink
Was a sound of unthinkables,
Your clerical ear
Went crack to hear.

Take water and ice it,
And give him, you say?

Lemon, and slice it,
Sugar, and spice it,
For Grandgousier?

Weary is weary,
Doctor O'Dreary,
Says Grandgousier;
But O man, to be beery,
Mirth-mad-merry,
At the finish of day!

Will you give him to guzzle,
Bishop Bamboozle,
A sponge from a jar
Of the rank vinegar?

For to sip where he lies
Till he ups and dies—
And this is his day—
Till the pink puffed eyes
See the old Paradise
Of the Grandgousier.

Miss Euphemia

Out of her house she crept,
Which was her winter's gaol,
Hearing the rumour that now
Was the birds' common tale—
Birds for all the ladies,
And husbands at church-door—
In fine, a spring was promised
As fifty years before.

A phase of green and tender
Was on the mortal clay,
But white upon her stick went
Miss Euphemia,
To count up all her tulips
That celebrated March,
Out of the frore escaping
To the blue upper arch.

Into her house she fled,
Buffeted back to prison,
And sought the very great-chair
From which she had arisen;
Down sat in her whiteness—
Bitter how she laughed—
Opening doors to March, yet
Quaking in his draught.

Nor scarcely can she, dwindling,
Throw down a bridge of dream
For a broken lady's traverse,

Neat-footing on the beam;
She had too much of winter,
And all her ways were lost,
And she sits with us only
Till next Pentecost.

Winter's Tale

Now the winter's frosty freight
Bows the tree and crowns the stump,
Yet sits poor Drury lone and late,
Watching his great cats jump.

Man of oak, is this your honour,
Buried in a mighty house,
To give your seven cats their humour,
Like a plaything, or a mouse?

Never your brethren toiled so hard,
Under the summer skies;
But now they use their long reward,
Wintering not so foolishwise.

Here's winter's ease, nor yet are any
Ladies laughing through his house;
Only truant thoughts of Jenny
Scampering through him like a mouse,

Jenny tripping through his head
As he met her in the wood;
But Drury wonders, is afraid,
If he could, or if he should;

And nods, while paw and claw and fang
Are flashing by the ingle—
Truly these be tiger's young
In this Kilkenny tangle.

But Tom the Tawny gave a cry!
And he took a mighty spring

To the oaken ledge, and by,
Like a mad, free thing;

And then, on seeing him go,
Old Drury started after,
In a good three-inch of snow,
And a winter-wind laughter.

Look at Drury's black coat
And the kit's red jacket!
Listen, Drury's great throat
In the hell-cat's racket!

Will you rhyme us their whither?
Oh, skipping and skating
To the bricks in the weather
Where the woman was waiting.

She cracked open her door
To the cat of Kilkenny:
Here is Tom on your floor,
Here is Drury, good Jenny.

What became of all those?
Well, Jenny she cried;
Tom vanished—God knows
If he lived or he died;

And Drury was corrected
Of being long a ninny,
When his wander-wits contracted,
And his arms took hold of Jenny.

Emily Hardcastle, Spinster

We shall come to-morrow morning, who were not to have
her love;
We shall bring no face of envy, but a gift of praise and
lilies
To the stately ceremonial we are not the heroes of.

Let the sisters now attend her, who are red-eyed, who are
wroth;
They were younger, she was finer, for they wearied of the
waiting
And they married them to merchants, being unbelievers both.

I was dapper when I dangled in my pepper-and-salt;
We were only local beauties, and we beautifully trusted
If the proud one had to tarry we would take her by default.

But right across her threshold has the Grizzled Baron come;
Let them wrap her as a princess, who would patter down a
stairway
Where the foreigner may take her for his gloomy halidom.

Number Five

"Come in out of the night," said the landlord.
"Hang up your caps, men, and I will pass the gin."
And what for us thirsty pirates but walk right in,
Me with my lips locked tight, saying not a word?

Five hang-dog men, and I was number five.
"Give us a drink then, mate. It's terrible loud
And it's terrible bitter under the storm-cloud,
And we be blown to deader than alive."

God bless strong drink that's given to the weak.
Five of us sat to the bottle, but I was one,
For thinking of what so desperate had been done,
I couldn't drink to my mates, lest I might speak.

"Here's one won't take his drink. Now is he proud?
This is a rummy lad," says the proprietor.
Says he, "I've not seen this young beauty quieter."
Thinks I, "Now it is going to come out loud."

And here comes the girl, and looks us in the face—
Never she'd seen us faces more in evil
Nor us great hulks with more power of the devil—
But finally she sits down in the sixth place,

And presses my hand. But I turn like a hare,
I run to the window over the black water,
Thinking if I may tell them what's the matter;
Happen it's dark, but I know what is down there.

But open field is better. And I slide down
And howl in the storm, with let for my slippery tongue
That never to girls nor priests may tell the wrong—
And I run by the river where the dead things drown.

Good Ships

Fleet ships encountering on the high seas
Who speak, and unto eternity diverge—
These hailed each other, poised on the loud surge
Of one of Mrs. Grundy's Tuesday teas,
Nor trimmed one sail to baffle the driving breeze.
A macaroon absorbed all her emotion;
His hue was ashy, but an effect of ocean;
They exchanged the nautical technicalities.

It was only a nothing or so, and thus they parted;
Away they sailed, most certainly bound for port,
So seaworthy, one felt they could not sink;
Still there was a tremor shook them, I should think—
Beautiful timbers fit for stormy sport
And into miserly merchant hulks converted.

Youngest Daughter

Who will wed the old dam's youngest daughter?
Not the sailor, filled with ale,
Who moored his expected boat to a stake in the water
And Heave-Ho, unto her halls went up for mating,
But was seduced by her ill-bred lady-in-waiting,
Round of bosom, and not so pale.

Nor the burgher's shiny boots and vest,
His considered views of marriage;
With her tidy scullery maid was he impressed,
Who kept that house from depreciation and dirt,
And (blushing for the wretched state of his undershirt)
He rode her home in his carriage.

Nor even the grim shanks of the scholar antiquary
Who was her last resort;
They set him humble down in the great library,
Then found him compromised with a musty tome,
And crying his Truelove therein had her home
And made him sweet disport.

Heart's Desire (so her mother named her) never will wed,
Fairest (she swore) in her time;
For "Revenge on these!" the passionate carline said;
"Henceforth the tightest nunnery be thy tomb;
Thy face a fever shall burn in every head;
Against thy walls incessant man shall come
And claw, but may not climb!"

Necrological

The friar had said his paternosters duly
And scourged his limbs, and afterwards would have slept;
But with much riddling his head became unruly,
He arose, from the quiet monastery he crept.

Dawn lightened the place where the battle had been won.
The people were dead—it is easy, he thought, to die—
These dead remained, but the living all were gone,
Gone with the wailing trumps of victory.

The dead men wore no raiment against the air,
Bartholomew's men had spoiled them where they fell;
In defeat the heroes' bosoms were whitely bare,
The field was white like meads of asphodel.

Not all were white; some gory and fabulous
Whom the sword had pierced and then the grey wolf eaten;
But the brother reasoned that heroes' flesh was thus,
Flesh fails, and the postured bones lie weather-beaten.

The lords of chivalry were prone and shattered,
The gentle and the body-guard of yeomen;
Bartholomew's stroke went home—but little it mattered,
Bartholomew went to be stricken of other foemen.

Beneath the blue ogive of the firmament
Was a dead warrior, clutching whose mighty knees
Was a leman, who with her flame had warmed his tent,
For him enduring all men's pleasantries.

Close by the sable stream that purged the plain
Lay the white stallion and his rider thrown.
The great beast had spilled there his little brain,
And the little groin of the knight was spilled by a stone.

The youth possessed him then of a crooked blade
Deep in the belly of a lugubrious knight;
He fingered it well, and it was cunningly made;
But strange apparatus was it for a Carmelite.

Then he sat upon a hill and hung his head,
Riddling, riddling, and lost in a vast surmise,
And so still that he likened himself unto those dead
Whom the kites of Heaven solicited with sweet cries.

Armageddon

Antichrist, playing his lissome flute and merry
As was his wont, debouched upon the plain;
Then came a swirl of dust, and Christ drew rein,
Brooding upon his frugal breviary.

Now which shall die, the roundel, rose, and hall,
Or else the tonsured beadsman's monkery?
For Christ and Antichrist arm cap-à-pie,
The prospect charms the soul of the lean jackal.

But Antichrist got down from the Barbary beast
And doffed his plume in courteous prostration;
Christ left his jennet's back in deprecation,
And raised him, his own hand about his waist.

And then they fingered chivalry's quaint page,
Of precedence discoursing by the letter.
The oratory of Antichrist was better,
He invested Christ with the elder lineage.

He set Christ on his own Mahomet's back
Where Christ sat fortressed up like Diomede;
The cynical hairy jennet was his steed,
Obtuse, and most indifferent in attack.

The lordings measured lances and stood still,
And each was loath to let the other's blood;
Originally they were one brotherhood;
There stood the white pavilion on the hill;

Nor were they hacked and harried to their boot;
Men die when wounds insufferable are got;
These plagued with immortality could not
When grim Lord Ares trod them underfoot.

To the white pavilion went the hierarchs,
If they might truce their honourable dispute;
Firm was the Christian's chin and he was mute,
And Antichrist ejected scant remarks.

Antichrist tendered a spray of rosemary
To serve his brother for a buttonhole;
Then Christ about his adversary's poll
Wrapped a dry palm inscribed "Mount Calvary."

Christ wore a dusty cassock, and the knight
Did him the honours of his tiring-hall,
Whence Christ did not come forth too finical,
But his egregious beauty richly dight.

With feasting they concluded every day,
And when the other shaped his phrases thicker,
Christ, introducing water in the liquor,
Made wine of more ethereal bouquet.

At wassail Antichrist would pitch the strain
For unison of all the retinue;
Christ beat the time, and hummed a stave or two,
But did not say the words, which were profane.

Perruquiers were privily presented,
Till knowing his need extreme, and his heart pure,

Christ let them dress him his thick chevelure,
And soon his beard was glozed and sweetly scented.

And so the Wolf said Brother to the Lamb,
The True Heir keeping with the poor Impostor,
The rubric and the holy paternoster
Were jangled strangely with the dithyramb.

It could not be. There was a patriarch,
A godly liege of old malignant brood,
Who could not fathom the new brotherhood
Between the children of the light and dark.

He sought the ear of Christ on these mad things,
And in the white pavilion when he stood,
And saw them featured and dressed like twins at food,
He poured in the wrong ear his misgivings.

He was discomfited; but Christ much more;
Christ shed unmannerly his devil's pelf,
Took ashes from the hearth and smeared himself,
Called for his smock and jennet as before.

His trump recalls his own to right opinions,
With scourge they mortify their carnal selves,
With stone they whet the ax-heads on the helves
And seek the Prince Beelzebub and minions.

Christ and his myrmidons, Christ at the head,
Chanted of death and glory and no complaisance;
Antichrist and the armies of malfeasance
Made songs of innocence and no bloodshed.

The immortal Adversary shook his head:
If now they fought too long, then he would famish;
And if much blood was shed, why, he was squeamish:
"These Armageddons weary me much," he said.

Epitaph

Napoleon took many captures and is dead,
Julius brought unto Rome many victories,
Nor did Alexander expire on a wastrel's bed;
But this was a somewhat greater captain than these.

He took a city too, O Eminences.
It was a city reared stubborn against a foe,
Furnished it was with no frail few defences,
But it fell to the intrepid Generalissimo.

Its two towers compacted of a tough masonry,
The right tower squat against the thunderbolts of Heaven,
The left tower sheer on the brink like a mighty tree
From the bottom of Hell, and terrible to the craven.

He was a lone besieger of a grim defence,
He was scarred, and weary of circling it round after round,
He battered incessantly upon its fundaments,
At last he bestrode it thundering to the ground.

A lone besieger, so Cæsar's ghost had said,
Leading no soldiers; but he had known black magic,
And mustered invisible regiments to his aid,
For he triumphed; and the envious Cæsars took it as tragic.

Judith of Bethulia

Beautiful as the flying legend of some leopard,
She had not yet chosen her great captain or prince
Depositary to her flesh, and our defence;
And a wandering beauty is a blade out of its scabbard.
You know how dangerous, gentlemen of threescore?
May you know it yet ten more.

Nor by process of veiling she grew the less fabulous.
Grey or blue veils, we were desperate to study
The invincible emanations of her white body,
And the winds at her ordered raiment were ominous.
Might she walk in the market, sit in the council of soldiers?
Only of the extreme elders.

But a rare chance was the girl's then, when the Invader
Trumpeted from the south, and rumbled from the north,
Beleaguered the city from four quarters of the earth,
Our soldiery too craven and sick to aid her—
Where were the arms could countervail his horde?
Her beauty was the sword.

She sat with the elders, and proved on their blear visage
How bright was the weapon unrusted in her keeping,
While he lay surfeiting on their harvest heaping,
Wasting the husbandry of their rarest vintage—
And dreaming of the broad-breasted dames for concubine?
These floated on his wine.

He was lapped with bay-leaves, and grass and fumiter weed,
And from under the wine-film encountered his mortal vision.

For even within his tent she accomplished his derision;
She loosed one veil and another, standing unafraid;
And he perished. Nor brushed her with even so much as a daisy?
She found his destruction easy.

The heathen are all perished. The victory was furnished,
We smote them hiding in our vineyards, barns, annexes,
And now their white bones clutter the holes of foxes,
And the chieftain's head, with grinning sockets, and varnished—
Is it hung on the sky with a hideous epitaphy?
No, the woman keeps the trophy.

May God send unto the virtuous lady her prince.
It is stated she went reluctant to that orgy,
Yet a madness fevers our young men, and not the clergy
Nor the elders have turned them unto modesty since.
Inflamed by the thought of her naked beauty with desire?
Yes, and chilled with fear and despair.

Conrad Sits in Twilight

Conrad, Conrad, aren't you old
To sit so late in your mouldy garden?
And I think Conrad knows it well,
Nursing his knees, too rheumy and cold
To warm the wraith of a Forest of Arden.

Neuralgia in the back of his neck,
His lungs filling with such miasma,
His feet dipping in leafage and muck:
Conrad! you've forgotten asthma!

Conrad's house has thick red walls
And chips on Conrad's hearth are blazing,
Slippers and pipe and tea are served,
Butter and toast, Conrad, are pleasing!
Still Conrad's back is not uncurved
And here's an autumn on him, teasing.

Autumn days in our section
Are the most used-up thing on earth
(Or in the waters under the earth),
Having no more colour nor predilection
Than cornstalks too wet for the fire,
A ribbon rotting on the byre,
A man's face as weathered as straw
By the summer's flare and the winter's flaw.

Nocturne

Where now is the young Adam, sultry in his Aiden?
And where is the goat-footed, pursuing his naked maiden?
Our man shall cut few capers in his dark seersucker coat,
His grave eye subduing the outrageous red tie at his throat,
Considering if he should carry his dutiful flesh to the ball,
Rather than open his book, which is flat, and metaphysical.

The centuries have blown hard, and dried his blood
Unto this dark quintessence of manhood;
Much water has passed the bridges, fretfully,
And borne his boats of passion to the sea;
There is no storm in this dusk, but a distant flash
Over the foamy sea where the great floods wash.

But still the plum-tree blooms, despite the rocks at its root,
Despite that everyone knows by now its wizened and little fruit,
And the white moon plunges wildly, it is a most ubiquitous ghost,
Always seeking her own old people that are a long time lost—
Till he is almost persuaded, and perhaps he would go to the ball,
If he had the heart, and the head, for a furious antique bacchanal.

Blackberry Winter

If the lady hath any loveliness, let it die.
For being drunken with the steam of Cuban cigars,
I find no pungence in the odour of stars,
And all my music goes out of me on a sigh.

But still would I sing to my maidenly apple-tree,
Before she has borne me a single apple of red;
The pictures of silver and apples of gold are dead;
But one more apple ripeneth yet maybe.

The garnished house of the Daughter of Heaven is cold.
I have seen her often, she stood all night on the hill,
Fiercely the pale youth clambered to her, till—
Hoarsely the rooster awakened him, footing the mould.

The breath of a girl is music—fall and swell—
The trumpets convolve in the warrior's chambered ear,
But I have listened, there is no one breathing here,
And all of the wars have dwindled since Troy fell.

But still I will haunt beneath my apple-tree,
Heedful again to star-looks and wind-words,
Anxious for the flash of whether eyes or swords,
And hoping a little, a little, that either may be.

Lichas to Polydor,

WHO REGRETTED ALL HIS YEARS OF SERVING CYTHEREA

Her huge affirmative emblazed thy sodden skies,
It was a sign had puffed up great the mortalest worm that dies;
But now thou knowest her sworn a spinster, and her true-tokens lies.

Rained her endearments thick as snow and covered thee,
Thy prayer was not appeased; naked and unrewarded must thou flee.
Not so had served thee Thalia, Charis, or Melpomene.

Much better marriages thou hadst becoming to thy station:
Remember the Powerful Ladies, unreluctant to thy passion,
Thou less than the bandy-legged of the heathen congregation!

Spiel of the Three Mountebanks

THE SWARTHY ONE—

Villagers who gather round,
This is Fides, my lean hound.
Bring your bristled village curs
To try his fang and tooth, sweet sirs!
He will rend them, he is savage,
Thinking nothing but to ravage,
Nor with cudgel, fire, rope,
May ye control my misanthrope;
He would tear the moon in the sky
And fly at Heaven, could he fly.
And for his ravening without cease
I have had of him no peace;
Only once I bared the knife
To quit my devil of his life,
But listen, how I heard him say,
"Think you I shall die to-day?
Since your mother cursed and died,
I am keeping at your side,
We are firmly knit together,
Two ends tugging at one tether,
And you shall see when I shall die
That you are mortal even as I."
Bring your stoutest-hearted curs
If ye would risk him, gentle sirs.

THE THICK ONE—

Countrymen, here's a noble frame,
Humphrey is my elephant's name.
When my father's back was bent

Under steep impediment,
Humphrey came to my possession,
With patient strength for all his passion.
Have ye a mountain to remove?
It is Humphrey's dearest love.
Pile his burden to the skies,
Loose a pestilence of flies,
Foot him in the quick morass
Where no laden beast can pass:
He will staunch his weariless back
And march unswerving on the track.
Have ye seen a back so wide,
So impenetrable hide?
Nor think ye by this Humphrey hill
Prince Hamlet bare his fardels ill?
Myself I like it not for us
To wear beneath an incubus,
I take offence, but in no rage
May I dispose my heritage;
Though in good time the vast and tough
Shall sink and totter soon enough.
So pile your population up,
They are a drop in Humphrey's cup;
Add all your curses to his pack
To make one straw for Humphrey's back.

The Pale One—
If ye remark how poor I am,
Come, citizens, behold my lamb!
Have ye a lion, ounce, or scourge,
Or any beast of dainty gorge?
Agnus lays his tender youth

Between the very enemy's mouth,
And though he sniff his delicate meat,
He may not bruise that flesh nor eat,
He may not rend him limb from limb,
If Agnus do but bleat on him.
Fierce was my youth, but like a dream
I saw a temple, and a stream,
And where I knelt and washed my sore,
This infant lamb stood on the shore,
He mounted with me from the river,
And still he cries, as brave as ever,
"Lay me down by the lion's side
To match my frailty with his pride!
Fain would I welter in my blood
To teach these lions true lionhood."
So daily Agnus would be slain
But daily is denied again,
And still the hungry lions range
While Agnus waits upon a change;
Only the coursing lions die
And in their deserts mortify.
So bring us lion, leopard, bear,
To try of Agnus without fear,
And ye less gentle than I am,
Come, be instructed of my Lamb.

Night Voices

By night and inky fog,
Unseen they hoped of all the synagogue,
Two pale high-fronted youths withdrew apart
Upheaving each his bitterness of heart
In a dark duologue.

"I have the whole hearsay,
They titled thee a little God to-day.
But didst thou promise to annul the tomb,
Complaisant with that frighted breed to whom
Thou fellowest in clay?"

"I sped their tremulous hope
For pity of their darkling horoscope.
For thou art Nicodemus, and thy sect
Hath schooled them so funereal, O stiff-necked,
Ye stinted all their scope."

"Our order doth not use
To ease them with false tidings of good news.
Our fashion is a jealous elder God
Who tempereth sometimes his chastening rod
But raiseth no dead Jews."

"Ye slay the cripples' hope,
Who would but slough their warty envelope,
The meek laborious who would mirth and play,
The tight-lipped righteous travailing for that day
When rock-bound graves may ope."

"Friend, these lies profit not
When carcasses so visibly do rot.
As well run forth and cry there is no Rome!
Still would the legionaries scourge them home,
Though they had fain forgot."

"Nay, this hope lasteth more,
And maketh the mortal mark bite not so sore.
Our Jewry is fanatic, and I said,
In three days must each tomb unclasp his dead!
Nor heard such joy before."

"Take heed, high-hearted youth,
For they will kill thee save thou speak them sooth,
And they will say attentive to thy grave,
The little carpenter's promises were brave,
But carrion telleth truth!"

"O dogma'd Pharisee,
The hope I startle flitteth wide of me;
Suppose in thy turn thou shouldst firmly swear
That I had cleft the tomb and breathed the air,
Would it not flutter free?"

And further on they walked,
Out of old passion in the heart they talked,
And when the grey morn glimmered overhead,
They found they trod the gardens of the dead,
And spectre-white they stalked.

Angered with a braggart kind
Prescribing others to its yoke
And seeming jauntily designed,
I rent my smooth locks and I spoke:

—Lordly, have ye intimations
Of more excellent pedigree,
That ye taint the other stations
With the limp of bastardy?

Can ye outscream the peahen,
Or outspring the springbok,
Or scare away the wind and rain
With Shibboleth or Fokmafok?

Rear ye prouder than a stallion,
Creep ye lower than a snail,
As ye tread your suave cotillion,
Satyrs in a swallowtail?

But likest brethren fall apart,
And who can tie the miscellany,
Plato, Scythian, dog, and wart?
One is One, but these be Many.

There was an ancient man withal,
Doctor of Genealogy,
With wisdom on his red eyeball,
Who heard and answered me;

His daughters wedded with the plague,
His pigeons wiven of the fox,
All the jewels in his bag
Gone in shipwreck on the rocks;

With none to mind or mourn,
He sat beneath his locust-tree,
But he saw my visage torn
And lifted up his voice to me:

—Aforetime there was one God only,
Simplex was his name, none other.
Ah, but Simplicity was lonely,
Nothing saying Father.

Feudal Heart without a fief,
Empty Imperator, Rex,
Jahveh, Allah, Indian Chief,
Pontiff, Mandarin, Multiplex.

Where were the singers of his state,
Who were the largess of his loins,
Unless he mightily begat
Other Gods, many sons?

The vague moon and the fierce sun,
Lampless in the deathy quiet,
Pricked his continence, waiting on
The whisper of the Fiat;

The fir-tree quivering in her vase,
And the hop-toad in his kettle,

And a lady's lovely face,
And the tight-suited beetle.

Out of joy they took their form,
Joyous they came forth and sped,
Both the able-bellied worm
And immaculate biped.

They were patterned prettily,
And of love; and even so,
Their young mouths cried terribly,
Ego, Ego, Ego!

If he wrought them for obeisance,
Simplicissimus missed his mark,
Too promiscuous of his essence,
Obsolescent Hierarch.

For the Stark, Prime, Simple,
When he multiplied his One,
Shared the holies of his temple
And conveyed his throne.

Some may have returned him praise:
I, who bended a good knee
As a novice in those days
To my mad Aunt Piety!

Have you heard the Ave sung?
Here's the cuckoo, bull, and fife,
Lark's bill and Cicero's tongue,
Loud of lustihood and strife.

And his messengers the suns,
Perfect clerks and bibliophiles,
Are stubborn hot automatons,
Running out their rebel wills.

Phœbe vibrant in the tree,
Running water, April pigments,
Mirrors changing endlessly:
"We are wholes and not fragments."

Man was the youngest child,
And knew the son then its own father?
It was thoroughly beguiled
Of its own image rather.

And the mere spied weed
With its red heart perfect centred:
"I am ultimate indeed,
And a God, well accoutred."

The free hearts and free lances,
Man and Beast and Thingdom:
"We unnatural Princes
Will parcel out his kingdom."

My son, the motley and the pied,
The swarming and oblivious brood,
Are swimming deep in fratricide,
Being brother-and-sisterhood.

So tell those Dignities Respective,
Noses counted to four hundred,
Tribes and orators invective!
Whom they slay are kindred!

On the Road to Wockensutter

"Sahara doth not keep her livid hell
Wholly unto herself," writes Herodote;
"Sirocco scourgeth even the greenlands well,
The pulver of her brimstone scratched my throat."

Brady had little Latin and less Greek,
Not his to verify the obscure quotation,
But Brady knew, no waterfall nor creek
Nor arctic tremor stayed his oxidation.

By sixty fiery miles they call a trail,
Red Hole communicates with Wockensutter.
Here Brady, who had started on a rail,
Pursued his march diminishing like butter.

For Brady had deployed the manifold
Beneath the sacred Principle of Venus.
But desert ladies named him greasy and old,
And the impanelled peers pronounced it heinous. . . .

"She is a verity, else all is nit,"
Cried Brady, his faith quivering with outrage,
And saw the yellow-feathered pert pewit
Who flashed upon the acrid sea of sage.

Noon of the second day made his ascension,
The Brady marched emblistered at the goal
And to the pewit made offensive mention
Of words that scored the tablets of her soul.

"A simple shotgun with a choke were best,"
Says Brady, looking for a place to sit;
But, as long eluded of Burd Helen's breast,
He adds, "Could any human engine hit;

"For you again are Venus, I suppose;
I have your evidences of shape and feather;
And no man more impatient ever rose
To see you turn to nothing altogether;

"And though I had a miracle of salt
To sprinkle on your saucy tilt of tail,
I think I'd rather loose you in default
Than catch another mere obscene female."

Prometheus in Straits

Garrulous gentlemen on a veranda,
Bibbers or non-bibbers of illicit potations,
Rehearsing the acta and the agenda
Of Republican or Democratic administrations,
I am not committed to taking memoranda
Culled from the lacunæ of your cerebrations.

And now approaches the radiant band, all spinster,
White spirits weaving a delirious rhythm of chatter
Of picture galleries and of Westminster—
But my sad, alas, insensitivity is too utter,
I attend you as some tired jungle monster,
The parrots' bonnets are annulled by the tedium of their twitter.

To the library then and the masterpieces?
Not now, though I risk the damage of your inference;
For before your alterations respect ceases,
The glowing centres you have laid over with absurd circumference;
Indeed you have undone them with exegesis,
And provoke me to a gesture not of deference.

Though I be Prometheus, my wits wandered
To bring my pious offices unto this people.
Where all must be the teachers, nullity is engendered,
My doctrine perishes crying for an ear that is simple,
The prophet is solicited before he has well thundered
And escapes with credit if he do not turn disciple.

My function concerns itself, however, with this planet,
My act is simple as an incident of vegetation,
I will go, then, to a streamside abounding with granite
Or gaunt place with no history nor human condition,
And, having unbuttoned myself, erect an altar on it
And comfort my knees with red bruises of prostration.

Plea in Mitigation

You have heard something muttered in my scorn:
"A little learning addleth this man's wit,
He crieth on our dogmas, Counterfeit!
And no man's bubble 'scapeth his sharp thorn.

"Nor he respecteth duly our tall steeple,
But solitary poring on his book,
Heareth our noise and hardly offereth look,
Nor liveth neighbourly with these the people."

With reason, friends, I am complained upon,
Who am a headstrong man, sentenced from birth
To love unusual gods beyond all earth,
And the easy gospels bruited hither and yon.

So I bring hurt upon mine own sweet kin,
And on my scholars, the young simple snails,
Treading their tumuli to holy grails;
I make reproach, then my deep grief sets in.

But, friends! acquit me of that stain of pride:
Much has been spoken solemnly together,
And you have heard my heart, so answer whether
I am so proud a fool, and godless beside.

Sages and friends, too often have you seen us
Deep in the midnight conclave as we used;
For my part, reverently were you perused;
No rank and primacy being hatched between us;

For my part, much beholden to you all,
Giving a little and receiving more;
Learning had stuffed this head with but lean lore
Betwixt the front bone and the occipital;

Anatomy, that doled my dubious features,
Had housed within me, close to my breastbone,
My dæmon, always clamouring, Up, Begone,
Pursue your gods faster than most of creatures!

And if an alien, hideously at feud
With those my generation, I have reason
To think to salve the fester of my treason:
A seven of friends exceeds much multitude.

Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son

Grim in my little black coat as the sleazy beetle,
And gone of hue,
Lonely, a man reputed for softening little,
Loving few—

Mournfully going where men assemble, unfriended, pushing
With laborious wares,
And glaring with little grey eyes at whom I am brushing,
Who would with theirs—

Full of my thoughts as I trudge here and trundle yonder,
Eyes on the ground,
Tricked by white birds or tall women into no wonder,
And no sound—

Yet privy to great dreams, and secret in vainglory,
And hot and proud,
And poor and bewildered, and longing to hear my own story
Rehearsed aloud—

How I have passed, involved in these chances and choices,
By certain trees
Whose tiny attent auricles receive the true voices
Of the wordless breeze—

And against me the councils of spirits were not then darkened
Who thereby house,
As I set my boots to the path beneath them, and hearkened
To the talking boughs—

How one said, "This ambulant worm, he is strangely other
Than they suppose"—
But one, "He was sired by his father and dammed by his
mother,
And acknowledges those"—

And then: "Nay, nay—this man is a changeling, and
knows not—
This was a Prince
From a far great kingdom—and should return, but goes
not—
Long years since"—

But like a King I was subject to a King's condition,
And I marched on,
Not testing at eavesdrop the glory of my suspicion,
And the talkers were gone—

And duly appeared I on the very clock-throb appointed
In the litten room,
Nor was hailed with that love that leaps to the Heir
Anointed:
"Hush, hush, he is come!"

Old Man Playing with Children

A discreet householder exclaims on the grandsire
In war-paint and feathers, with fierce grandsons and axes,
Dancing around a backyard fire of boxes,
"Watch grandfather, he'll set the house on fire."

But I will unriddle for you the thought of his mind,
An old one you cannot open with conversation.
What animates those thin legs in risky motion?
Mixes the snow on the head with snow on the wind?

"Grandson, grandsire. We are equally boy and boy.
Do not offer me your reclining-chair and slippers
With tedious old women talking in wrappers.
This life is not good but in danger and in joy.

"It is you who are elder to these and younger to me
That are penned as slaves by your properties and causes
And never walk out of your shaped insupportable houses,
And shamefully, when boys shout, go in and flee.

"God forgive me, I know too well your middling ways,
Having taken care and performed ignominies unreckoned
Between the first brief childhood and the brief second,
But I will be more honourable in these days."

Captain Carpenter

Captain Carpenter rose up in his prime
Put on his pistols and went riding out
But had got wellnigh nowhere at that time
Till he fell in with ladies in a rout.

It was a pretty lady and all her train
That played with him so sweetly but before
An hour she'd taken a sword with all her main
And twined him of his nose for evermore.

Captain Carpenter mounted up one day
And rode straightway into a stranger rogue
That looked unchristian but be that as may
The Captain did not wait upon prologue.

But drew upon him out of his great heart
The other swung against him with a club
And cracked his two legs at the shinny part
And let him roll and stick like any tub.

Captain Carpenter rode many a time
From male and female took he sundry harms
He met the wife of Satan crying "I'm
The she-wolf bids you shall bear no more arms."

Their strokes and counters whistled in the wind
I wish he had delivered half his blows
But where she should have made off like a hind
The bitch bit off his arms at the elbows.

And Captain Carpenter parted with his ears
To a black devil that used him in this wise
O Jesus ere his threescore and ten years
Another had plucked out his sweet blue eyes.

Captain Carpenter got up on his roan
And sallied from the gate in hell's despite
I heard him asking in the grimmest tone
If any enemy yet there was to fight?

"To any adversary it is fame
If he risk to be wounded by my tongue
Or burnt in two beneath my red heart's flame
Such are the perils he is cast among.

"But if he can he has a pretty choice
From an anatomy with little to lose
Whether he cut my tongue and take my voice
Or whether it be my round red heart he choose."

It was the neatest knave that ever was seen
Stepping in perfume from his lady's bower
Who at this word put in his merry mien
And fell on Captain Carpenter like a tower.

I would not knock old fellows in the dust
But there lay Captain Carpenter on his back
His weapons were the old heart in his bust
And a blade shook between rotten teeth alack.

The rogue in scarlet and grey soon knew his mind
He wished to get his trophy and depart

With gentle apology and touch refined
He pierced him and produced the Captain's heart.

God's mercy rest on Captain Carpenter now
I thought him Sirs an honest gentleman
Citizen husband soldier and scholar enow
Let jangling kites eat of him if they can.

But God's deep curses follow after those
That shore him of his goodly nose and ears
His legs and strong arms at the two elbows
And eyes that had not watered seventy years.

The curse of hell upon the sleek upstart
Who got the Captain finally on his back
And took the red red vitals of his heart
And made the kites to whet their beaks clack clack.

These Winters

Time was when the gods we gentlemen deride
Visited us with winters that were cold;
And I could assist at a thousand stories told
Of black turned white, and flood solidified
(All but the red, which was at early tide),

And of our smoky breath that stained the air
As we slipped like roes between the earth and the sky
And, out of ourselves with glory, made outcry;
But the little devils of sense were frozen where
There was such purity of atmosphere.

And were we ever driven into house?
We were the brave who would be purified
And a great weather was emptied on our pride;
But weather or we have changed; for we make mows
At the present gods, and say Where Nows, Where Nows,

And are diverted in our tepid ease
With asking if the gods, as we are told,
Will blot the sun with such a pall of cold
That gentlemen pink and slippered even as these
Shall dance like locusts on the winter breeze.

Old Mansion

As an intruder I trudged with careful innocence
To mask decently a quite meddlesome stare,
Passing the old house often on its eminence,
Exhaling my foreign weed on its weighted air.

Here age seemed newly imaged for the historian
After his monstrous châteaux on the Loire,
A beauty not for depicting by old vulgarian
Reiterations which gentle readers abhor.

Each time of seeing, I absorbed some other feature
Of a house whose annals in no wise could be brief
Nor ignoble; for it expired as sweetly as Nature,
With her tinge of oxidation on autumn leaf.

It was a Southern manor. One need hardly imagine
Towers, white monoliths, or even ivied walls;
But sufficient state if its peacock *was* a pigeon;
Where no courts kept, but grave rites and funerals.

(Indeed, not distant, possibly not external
To the property, were tombstones, where the catafalque
Had carried their dead; and projected a note too charnel
But for the honeysuckle on its intricate stalk.)

Stability was the character of its rectangle
Whose line was seen in part and guessed in part
Through trees. Decay was the tone of old brick and shingle.
Green blinds, dragging, frightened the watchful heart

To assert, "Your mansion, long and richly inhabited,
Its exits and entrances suiting the children of men,
Will not for ever be thus, O man, exhibited,
And one had best hurry to enter it if one can."

And at last, with my happier angel's own temerity
Did I clang their brazen knocker against the door,
To beg their dole of a look, in simple charity,
Or the crumbs of legend dropping from their great store.

But it came to nothing—and may such gross denial
Which has been deplored duly with a beating of the breast
Never shorten the tired historian, loyal
To acknowledge defeat and discover a new quest—

The old mistress was ill, and sent my dismissal
By one even more wrappered and lean and dark
Than that warped concierge and imperturbable vassal
Who bids you begone from her master's Gothic park.

Emphatically, the old house crumbled; the ruins
Would litter, as already the leaves, this petted sward;
But no annalist went in to the lord or the peons;
The antiquary would finger the bits of shard.

But on retreating, I saw myself in the token,
How loving from my foreign weed the feather curled
On the languid air; and I went with courage shaken
To dip, alas, into some unseemlier world.

Inland City

She lies far inland, and no stick nor stone of her
Ever has looked on the sounding sea,
And how should she speak of her swift barks and roadways
And white sloops crowding to lift and be free?

"Ye towers and steeples, and belfries and crosses,
Toll for the doomed ships passing to sea.
But ye walls and gateposts, and ye halls and gardens,
Moor in my little boats vigilantly!"

Philomela

Procne, Philomela, and Itylus,
Your names are liquid, your improbable tale
Is recited in the classic numbers of the nightingale.
Ah, but our numbers are not felicitous,
It goes not liquidly for us.

Perched on a Roman ilex, and duly apostrophized,
The nightingale descanted unto Ovid;
She has even appeared to the Teutons, the swilled and gravid;
At Fontainebleau it may be the bird was gallicized;
Never was she baptized.

To England came Philomela with her pain,
Fleeing the hawk her husband; querulous ghost,
She wanders when he sits heavy on his roost,
Utters herself in the original again,
The untranslatable refrain.

Not to these shores she came! this other Thrace,
Environ barbarous to the royal Attic;
How could her delicate dirge run democratic,
Delivered in a cloudless boundless public place
To an inordinate race?

I pernoctated with the Oxford students once,
And in the quadrangles, in the cloisters, on the Cher,
Precociously knocked at antique doors ajar,
Fatuously touched the hems of the hierophants,
Sick of my dissonance.

I went out to Bagley Wood, I climbed the hill;
Even the moon had slanted off in a twinkling,
I heard the sepulchral owl and a few bells tinkling,
There was no more villainous day to unfulfil,
The diuturnity was still.

Up from the darkest wood where Philomela sat,
Her fairy numbers issued. What then ailed me?
My ears are called capacious but they failed me,
Her classics registered a little flat!
I rose, and venomously spat.

Philomela, Philomela, lover of song,
I am in despair if we may make us worthy,
A bantering breed sophistical and swarthy;
Unto more beautiful, persistently more young
Thy fabulous provinces belong.

THE END

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